

Blinded by the Right:

America Stumbles into the Ditch

by WILLIAM A. COOK

America stumbled yet further this week into the ditch of fanaticism, led by its blind President who is led by Ariel Sharon. With the exit of Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, leader of the Labor Party, from Sharon's coalition government, and with Sharon's appointment of Shaul Mofaz as Defense Minister, a hardliner who has directed the occupation of the Palestinians for the past two years, America's support for Israel drags it further into the morass of rabid fundamentalism. Following the exit, Sharon's coalition retains only 55 of 120 seats. He will turn to ultra-right and religious parties to garner the numbers he needs to retain control. Such a coalition will move Israel even further in the direction of eliminating the Palestinian right to a homeland. That in turn will drag the region further and further into chaos.

Mofaz' appointment already complements Sharon's drive to force religious fundamentalism on the people of Israel. As his cabinet moves to the extreme right, he ineluctably pushes his people to the fulfillment of ancient myths. More tellingly for America, President Bush's continuing capitulation to Ariel Sharon's deeply rooted desire to destroy any possibility of a Palestinian state yokes America's foreign policy to these same ancient myths that have tethered ultra conservative Jews together for over 2500 years. While the Zionist movement can be traced to 1885 when Nathan Birnbaum edited *Selbst-Emanzipation* and promulgated the ideas of the Hovevei Zion movement (The Jewish Agency for Israel, www.us-israel.org), the belief that God's chosen people had a right to "Judea and Samaria," the "Promised Land," goes back to Moses. Indeed, the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise asserts "Some Religious Zionist Jews see the formation of the secular state as accelerating the process of redemption, with themselves playing a major role in doing G-d's will by serving the state, whose creation is often seen as miraculous." (Emphasis mine) (www.us-israel.org)

As Sharon's cabinet closes ranks around the right-wing Likud priorities, and with the entrance into that cabinet of Effi Eitam, head of the National Religious Party, the merger of Sharon's political agenda, the denial that the Palestinians have a right to a homeland, and the mythological beliefs of Eitam's expressed purpose for entering politics, the return of the Promised Land to God's chosen, Israeli policy toward the Palestinian people becomes mired in religious myths more than 2500 years old, myths that give the Jews authorization to destroy "... the experts of impurity, cursedness and evil." as Eitam characterizes the Palestinians. (LA TIMES, Sunday, 6/30/02, A11)

According to Eitam, the Palestinians are not ordinary people, but "uncircumcised," "little people," and "evil," by contrast with the Jews who are "the blessed," and who have "returned home for our rendezvous with the Lion of the World and the

Lioness that is our nation." (LA TIMES) This man, who claims to bring morality back to politics, openly proclaims his policy toward the Palestinians: "And when we pounce on you (the Palestinians), and it will happen when we come with vengeance against your terrible evil, woe will be unto you we will make a reckoning with you." (LA TIMES) Here is a prophet of old speaking in the language of the Old Testament as though it were truth and the source of domestic and foreign policy in this new millennium.

Eitam is not alone in his expressed ideology. Gush Emunim rabbis, another right-wing religious group, have "reiterated that Jews who kill Arabs should be free from all punishment." They have gone further; they claim that Arabs living in Palestine are thieves because the land was Jewish and belongs to them. (Prof. Israel Shahak, www.abbc.com) These beliefs arise from adherence to centuries old myths that have no relevance in today's world either politically or theologically, yet they persist despite our perspective on dramatically similar events in the past.

Consider our enlightened view of the ancient "Crusades," those ushered in by Urban II and later by Innocent III, as they compare with the conflicts current in Palestine. Innocent gathered 50,000 troops to destroy the Cathars in the 13th century, a heretical sect that threatened the absolute authority of the Roman Catholic Church. The recounting of the slaughters of the heretics during the "Albigensian Crusade" by the monk of Vaux-Cernay concludes with the same phrase after each massacre, "and the pilgrims (crusaders) seizing nearly sixty heretics burned them with infinite joy." (Sismondi 45) They, too, like Eitam, found joy in slaughtering those God determined to be evil. Indeed, the radical elite tend to enjoy fulfilling God's word as they have determined His meaning: Sismondi declares "The more zealous they were for the glory of God, the more ardently they labored for the destruction of heretics, the better Christians they thought themselves."

Now we have Eitam and Likud coupled with Sharon's personal drive to ensure that only the Jews possess what used to be Palestinian land. How similar the cries of praise to God of the Crusaders, "How glorious are the victors who return from battle! How blessed are the martyrs who die in battle." Compare this response to the conquering Jews after the 1982 war, "Oh Lord, Oh Lord, You have chosen us for conquest!" (Chomsky 96) All ruling elites use ancient myths to move their people to "take up the cross" against the impure so that sacred land given to them by God can be cleansed and returned to its rightful owners.

These myths lie deep in the psyche of the ultra-right and the National Religious Party that Eitam heads. Perhaps the article by Mordechai Nisan, "Judaism and Politics" in the Jerusalem Post of Jan. 18, 1983, captures the thinking most graphically: "At the dawn of Jewish history, contact with the Land of Israel established the principle that the presence of non-Jews in the country is morally and politically irrelevant to the national right of the Jews to settle and possess the Land The Bible states the Jewish right regardless of non-Jewish presence

Dwelling in the Land is the Jewish priority and it is no way restricted, let alone nullified, by a non-Jewish majority population in any given part of the Land" (Chomsky 444).

Nisan understands the dilemma this position causes in a democratic age since it appears to be a non-democratic position. But his response is blatantly pro-Jewish: "it is nowhere provided that non-Jews will enjoy full equal rights as a national community. The fact that "the Land is in the eternal possession of the Jewish people alone" is not fully understood by other people because they have not recognized that Western liberal ideas are no longer sustainable in this modern age! Chomsky offers this quote that references Maimonides thinking: "There is no relation between the law of Israel [Torat Yisrael] and atheistic modern humanism in a divinely-commanded war one must destroy, kill and eliminate men, women, and children."

Gush Emunim thinking and its counterparts among the growing elite that seem to have gained power in Israel in this last year fall prey to the malaise that inflicted Kurtz in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness": the acceptance in themselves of absolute righteousness and self-perceived fulfillment resulting in the unquestioned need to wantonly slaughter innocents to achieve their own conception of their eminence despite behavior that is barbaric, bestial, and inhumane. Reaching this level of behavior requires disassembling rational thought, indeed a total rejection of it, blind adherence to beliefs that have no justification outside of the fanatical zealots own cult, and an abhorrence of normal morality that applies to humans in favor of a morality that fulfills the cults own perceived destiny. Ultimate depravity becomes the end product of God's commands.

The belief in the "unity of man," in the natural rights of men and women, has given way to the "unity of nations," specifically in this instance to the Israeli nation, the homeland of the Jewish race. This understanding places the elite, who interpret the Biblical stories, in a position of immense power since they have not only determined that God speaks, but that God has given a specific piece of geography to a specific people regardless of conditions that have existed for thousands of years. This understanding allows for, indeed demands, that international law, internationally determined human rights provisions, and the philosophical foundations of Western thought be abandoned in favor of God's directives as determined by a small segment of a small population as though they alone possess truth.

The President, a known born-again Christian, has ties to those fundamentalist denominations that support the Zionist aspirations to create a Jewish state, not because they favor Judaism, but because they believe in ancient myths as well: the necessity for the Jews to reoccupy Judea and Samaria if the Second Coming is to happen. Bush's linkage to these denominations and his dependence on the Israeli lobbyists in this country have governed his policy toward the conflicts in the mid-east. His recent "vision" statement (an apt mythological appellation) on the

conflict unites him ineluctably to Sharon. Nothing that he said forestalls or even minimizes the likelihood of complete Israeli control and occupation of the land formerly owned by the Palestinians. In short, the President has linked America to those ancient myths, stories that compel one people to slaughter another because their God has given them the right to act. This thinking is no different than that used by Hamas authorities when they inculcate into their members the God given right to destroy the Jews because that is what God demanded in the Koran.

Would anyone have believed that in the year 2002 America would join ranks with fanatics driven by fabricated stories more than 2500 years old as the basis for foreign policy? Our acceptance of Sharon's administration and its savage policies also means we have accepted the fanatics of Islam who use the same God as the Israelis to justify their atrocities. These mythologies become the motivating tools of those in power to justify their purpose. They grab at the opportunities present -- fear inflicted by enemies of the people, righteous behavior demanded by their God, promise of rewards in the hereafter for those joining against the forces of evil, and ultimate victory for the myths that gave them purpose to carry out their desires. It is unfortunate that America has been hoodwinked into supporting beliefs that should have died a quiet death years and years ago. What a mockery of international law, of the Geneva Convention on Human Rights, and America's proclaimed belief in Democracy and the inherent rights guaranteed to all people is our obeisance to the whims of those who would find recourse to oppression in the pages of a mythological text.

© Copyright William A. Cook. All rights reserved.